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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination
and Protection of Minorities
Working Group on Contemporary Forms
of Slavery
Seventeenth session
4-13 May 1992
Items 4 and 5 of the provisional agenda

OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE WORKING GROUP DURING ITS FOURTEENTH, FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH SESSIONS

REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS IN OTHER FIELDS OF CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF SLAVERY

Information received from non-governmental organizations

Note by the Secretary-General

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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEMOCRATIC LAWYERS

[19 January 1992]
[Original: French]

1. The International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL) has supplemented its 6 June 1991 report by information provided by a Peruvian Bishop, Mgr. Gastelumendi, attesting to the existence of a traffic in poor children who are abducted and used for removal of organs, and statements by the Central Office of Franciscan Missionaries in Honduras reporting trade in children for organ removal.

2. The IADL has recently put together a large number of press excerpts, dating from 1987, 1988 and 1991, in which various journalists have investigated the traffic in children's organs:

(a) On 14 April 1987, articles in L'Humanité (Maïté Pinero) and Le Monde. Articles on 23 April and 2 June in L'Humanité. On 18 December, publication of an article by the National Ethics Committee, in France, with a statement by Mr. Lucien Sève on kidnapping, "Stock of organs for sale for a small fortune";

(b) On 27 January 1988, an article in L'Humanité, on 15 September another article in the same newspaper (Jacques Moran), on 23 September an article in Libération (Michel Raffoul) and an article in the September issue of the monthly Viva (Michel Raffoul and Maïté Pinero);

(c) On 12 December 1991, an article in Libération (Maria-Laura Avignolo) and one in the 16-22 December issue of the Weekly Voici (Isabelle Verbaere).

3. As in Témoignage Chrétien and La Croix of a few years back, the titles of these articles are obviously aimed at shocking the public: "For sale: children's hearts", "Mutilators of children", "Five babies placed in France ... (children from 5 months to 11 years old, some to serve as organ donors)", "Report by Lucien Sève on respect for the person", "Babies killed, kidnapped, dismembered", "A visa for an organ", "Traffic in children", "World traffic in human organs", "The baby connection", "Organ mafia scouring the shanty towns", etc. The sources named by these journalists are statements by doctors, the police, Interpol, judges and officials. They cannot all be taken at face value, but we can no longer ignore the problem and the terrible human rights violations involved or the fact that the kidnapping of children and their subsequent disappearance are crimes against humanity.

4. In document E/CN.4/Sub.2/1990/43, Mexico acknowledges that children have been adopted for unlawful ends that include the sale of children for profit and even the sale of organs (para. 38). Mexico is the only State Member of the United Nations to date that has officially acknowledged the sale of organs removed from children. It is difficult to maintain that there is no evidence of traffic in organs if a State officially announces that it is aware of such traffic.

5. A few years back, a journalist and a member of IADL reported the disappearance of several dozen children after the Armero disaster in Colombia. These children, who had been taken to shelters, had most probably been abducted after eluding the supervision of the first-aid workers, who had not been able to draw up lists of the names of the surviving children in time. Since learning that channels for the traffic in organs are increasing in Colombia, we now believe that the Armero disappearances are connected with the use of poor children left orphaned by the volcano's eruption for purposes of organ removal.

6. Owing to growing public awareness of this tragic situation, the IADL would like to repeat its recommendations, submitted to and adopted by the Working Group in August 1991, to the effect that Governments, the United Nations and its specialized agencies, especially the World Health Organization, Interpol and the humanitarian non-governmental organizations, should thoroughly investigate all the information they can obtain, in order that these practices may be denounced and prosecuted and that all possible measures should be taken to identify and indict the criminals.

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION TERRE DES HOMMES

[15 March 1992]
[Original: French]

1. Child prostitution is found as often in developed as in developing countries, although to differing degrees, for children are the most easily exploited group in all of human society. Frightening figures have been put forward concerning the number of child prostitutes: there are said to be some 500,000 of them in Brazil, 250,000 in Thailand, 20,000 in Manila and 10,000 in Sri Lanka.

2. In the region of Asia and the Pacific, prostitution is rising sharply owing to economic changes, migration, the high unemployment rate and the increase in tourism. The ideology of male supremacy is another cause of this increase. Together with child prostitution, there is a growing traffic in women and children, which is one of the most lucrative and easiest to conduct.

3. The International Federation Terre des Hommes (IFTDH) has received reports concerning Thailand according to which child prostitution has expanded to rural areas. For many peasant families, particularly in the northern part of the country, the sale of a daughter for prostitution has become a means of survival and a way of obtaining consumer goods that are symbols of social advancement. The trade in children has become so lucrative that demand now exceeds supply at the local level. As a result, this trade is spreading to the neighbouring countries.

4. In addition to poverty, which is the best-known cause of child prostitution, there is the desire of some parents to improve their living conditions and obtain consumer goods such as household appliances. At present, it is said that some parents are now becoming increasingly aware of the fate awaiting their children, but they do not consider their action to be a violation of the child's rights. Prostituting oneself to help one's family

has become an acceptable value, as it were, for a number of rural dwellers in various regions of Thailand. In this context, preventive action is needed at the parent level, together with the possibility of prosecuting those who deliberately transgress their role and sell their children for prostitution.

5. In the field of exploitation of child labour, it is urgent to finalize, adopt and implement the programme of action on this subject. In the opinion of IFTDH, child labour is counter-productive in the struggle against poverty and underdevelopment, for it often happens that children work whereas their parents are unemployed. This continues for generations and results in the fact that adults spend their lives in underemployment, for they have received no training while spending their youth performing thankless and harmful work. The only logical explanation for such an abnormal situation is profit. In this context, an international label, specific to each type of product, certifying that an item for sale was not produced by children, might be established or extended if already in existence.

6. The IFTDH has received reports on child servants in Haiti. Seventy per cent of this group is said to be made up of girls. These children represent a significant stratum of urban society in Haiti. They work in the homes of well-to-do, middle-class or poor families. There are over 40,000 of them in Port-au-Prince alone, and they come from the poorest families in the country, especially in rural areas. Because they are unskilled, they are forced to accept badly paid jobs and used for all sorts of domestic work. They rise very early, go to bed very late and have only four or five hours' rest a night. They are discriminated against and considered as inferior.

7. One member of the IFTDH is supporting a project aimed at halting the exodus to the cities and helping child servants by giving them the opportunity to learn to read and write and receive vocational training.

8. Education is generally agreed to be the most effective way of ending child labour. Thus the IFTDH would like to repeat its comments concerning the part of the Programme of action for the elimination of the exploitation of child labour that deals with education. This part is too general and should be reformulated, refined and developed.

FRIENDS WORLD COMMITTEE FOR CONSULTATION

[17 January 1992]
[Original: English]

Child soldiers

1. Tens of thousands of children are recruited into armed forces. Some of these children are as young as seven years old. Many children have been maimed or killed as a direct result of participating in armed conflicts. Others suffer from psychological trauma, and large numbers of children are captured and detained in prisoner-of-war camps.

2. Some children join armed forces voluntarily, perhaps inspired by the idea of liberating their country. Others join in order to satisfy their basic

needs of food, clothing and shelter. But many are forcibly recruited. This not only raises problems for the eradication of slavery-like practices and the exploitation of child labour but is also a gross violation of human rights.

3. In its report on child soldiers, the Friends World Committee for Consultation makes a number of recommendations including the following:

(a) Governments should ratify the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two Additional Protocols;

(b) The United Nations Commission on Human Rights should appoint a special rapporteur to monitor implementation of standards concerning the use of children in armed forces;

(c) The age of recruitment into armed forces should be raised from 15 to 18 years;

(d) The United Nations Secretary-General should initiate a high-level study on the use of children in armed forces;

(e) Children fleeing recruitment into armed forces should be recognized as refugees.

Girls at war

4. Not much is known about the participation of girls in the wars of the end of the twentieth century, for the role of girls at war is rarely highlighted in news coverage by war correspondents or even in magazines promoting the advancement of women and girls.

5. While the Convention on the Rights of the Child sets the minimum age of recruitment into the armed forces at 15, a considerable body of opinion hopes that the minimum age will be raised to 18 by the time of The Hague Conference in 1999, thus protecting all minors from participation in war.

6. In some 40 recent wars in which children are known to have taken part, girls have been or were soldiers or military support forces in at least 20. A few British girls are among the minors sent to the Gulf war in 1991. The fate of these minors was publicized in a national campaign to raise the age of enlistment to 18. Girls at present are reported to be fighting in El Salvador, Guatemala, Lebanon, Mozambique, with Palestinian forces in Lebanon and Israel, in Peru, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. Young women are fighting in the war in Croatia but whether they are under 18 has not been indicated in available news reports.

7. Relevant studies from different parts of the world all show that a significant proportion of children who have served as soldiers develop serious psychological problems as a result of their war experience: emotional disturbances, distortion of moral values, delayed reactions. It is not likely that the girls escape such problems.